We'll show you how to get your required amount of fruits and veggies. Taste

Tampa Bay Times

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In the know

EXPECT ARCTIC AIR TO RETURN TO TAMPA BAY

Hopefully you enjoyed the sunny weather, because it's about to get very chilly. Daytime temperatures will be in the low 60s today, but overnight temperatures will plunge into the 20s and 30s. The National Weather Service has already declared a freeze watch for the Tampa Bay region through Thursday morning. Make sure to cover your plants and bring your pets inside. **Local, 1B**

'We've got to play Florida more'

Steve Martin and Martin Short, the longtime friends and comedy collaborators, will return to the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg on Friday to joke, swap stories and play a little music. **Etc, 2B**

Apartment boom is spreading

Developers are moving west from downtown St. Petersburg. The new projects, all by out-of-state developers, will be more moderately priced than those downtown and add more than 650 units to a rental market that doesn't seem ready to slow down. **Business, 4B**

You better enjoy it while it lasts

The come-from-behind victory by the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday made for great TV, but history shows that there's a good chance heartbreak is coming. **Tom Jones column, 1C**

TODAY'S WEATHER

Cold tonight

8 a.m.	Noon	4 p.m.	8 p.m.
49°	59°	58°	49°

0% chance of rain

More, back page of Sports

tampabay.com

New-look All Eyes

In our redesigned All Eyes photo gallery, you can see the day's top photo, the week's best images and collections of photos from news events at **tampabay.com/photos**.

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Accuser: Latvala 'was predatory'

"Women are sexualized in virtually every arena — particularly where power can be wielded to force and exploit outcomes. This norm must continue to change."

Laura McLeod, former Tallahassee lobbyist

SCOTT KEELER | Times

ABOVE: Legislative aide Laura McLeod, 59, a former lobbyist, left the profession after she said she was sexually harassed by former Republican state Sen. Jack Latvala.

An ex-lobbyist's journals and text messages recount groping, harassment and feelings of dread when encountering the former senator.

BY MARY ELLEN KLAS
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE

When the text messages from state Sen. Jack Latvala of Clearwater would appear on lobbyist Laura McLeod's cellphone, her heart would race, her eyes would tear up, and she'd be overcome with a familiar, nauseous feeling and the thought: "Why won't this stop?"

"You looked good in committee. I woke up wanting you," Latvala wrote in a text message in March 2015. "No panties Friday," he wrote another day.

McLeod, who was the executive director and lobbyist for the nonprofit Florida Association of DUI Programs, said one frequent request she learned to dread was: "Where are you. Want to see you!"

It became a pattern. Nearly every time McLeod went to Latvala's Senate office, "he went to close the door and he turned around to hug me and then would grope me or touch me inappropriately," she recalled.

The first time she went to his office after he returned to the state Senate in 2011, "he unbuttoned my jacket and he felt me up." Other times, she said, he would move his hand down her shirt to her breast, or quickly push his fingers up her skirt, up her legs and around her buttocks. The last time, during the 2017 session, he even complained that her bra was too tight.

The woman whose testimony led to the resignation of one of Florida's most powerful politicians did not plan to speak out. Even after McLeod read the Nov. 3 Politico account of the six anonymous women who accused Latvala, 66, of sexual harassment — and noted that the claims were strikingly similar to her own experiences — the longtime lobbyist and now legislative aide remained quiet.

» See MCLEOD, 6A

"I loved my service in the Florida Senate. I think I was good at my job and did much good for the State of Florida. By resigning I paid a heavy price for my weakness."

Sen. Jack Latvala, responding to McLeod's allegations

Read the full statement, **6A**

Funding for fees

The treasury of a failed campaign for governor is put to use for legal fees. **Local, 1B**

Bill unifies 3 USF sites

The plan would phase out separate accreditation at the campuses.

BY CLAIRE MCNEILL
Times Staff Writer

Separate accreditation has long been a point of pride and a stamp of independence for the St. Petersburg and Sarasota-Manatee branches of the University of South Florida.

Graduates of those schools frame diplomas bearing the name of their own universities, which all fall under the umbrella of the Tampa-based USF System.

But under proposed changes to a bill moving through the Florida House of Representatives, the USF System as it stands today could be no more.

Instead, USF could have to phase out its separate accreditation at St. Petersburg and Sarasota-Manatee, melding the entire system into one unit.

"It's an opportunity for St. Petersburg and Sarasota-Manatee to have a pre-eminent university in their community," said Rep. Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, who is behind the push. "I think, naturally, it will have them rising together as opposed to being separate limbs."

The provision is tucked away in a proposed committee substitute to the House's version of a massive higher education package that passed unanimously in the Senate last week. Among other changes, the Senate bill would boost Bright Futures merit scholarships and tweak the way the state rewards university performance.

The House version mostly follows suit.

But a proposed version, being discussed today in the House's Post-Secondary Education Committee, adds the USF provision and gives the school a hard deadline of January 2019 to come up with a consolidation plan.

The move would return USF to an earlier arrangement, when USFSP and USFSM served as satellite campuses of the larger university. In the late 1990s, Florida lawmakers started a process to formally separate USFSP from the main campus after complaints that it wasn't reaching its potential under the con-

» See USF, 7A

Boat operator had past problems

The shuttle company in a fatal fire had safety and maintenance issues before a 2004 blaze.

BY ZACHARY T. SAMPSON, HOWARD ALTMAN AND SARA DINATALE
Times Staff Writers

PORT RICHEY — The casino boat operator whose shuttle caught fire Sunday, leaving one passenger dead, says it does not know what could have caused the blaze.

But federal records show the company, now called Tropical Breeze Casino Cruz, had another boat fire more than 10 years ago that was preceded by poor maintenance and insufficient training.

A spokeswoman for the company denied any connection between the incidents Tuesday.

"Who we were 14 years ago and who we are today, and what happened 14 years ago and what happened Sunday, are not relevant to each other," Beth Fifer said. She said the business had gone more than a decade without having another fire, evidence that "changes were implemented." She declined to elaborate, calling it "a dead issue."

After the 2004 blaze, the National Transportation Safety Board investigated and found several safety issues.

Fifer said that incident was "a long time ago," and the company today has daily maintenance routines and a fire training program it shares with the Coast Guard. Fifer credited the captain, Michael Batten, with working quickly Sunday to run the shuttle boat aground in the shallows of the Pithlachascotee River. The crew didn't even hand out life jackets before passengers jumped overboard.

"If we would have taken the time to hand out life jackets," she said, "we would be talking several deaths right now."

» See BOAT, 4A

On the Web

Drone footage shows the aftermath of Sunday's fire in Pasco County.
video.tampabay.com

Courtesy of Chuck Vincent

A drone image taken Tuesday shows what remains of the casino shuttle boat that caught fire in Pasco County on Sunday.

Tougher to dodge flu in Tampa Bay this year

Illnesses and hospitalizations are up over the past two seasons. A shot is recommended.

BY JUSTINE GRIFFIN
Times Staff Writer

Feeling a little sniffly, scratchy or stuffed up? It may be the flu, and you don't want to wait around to see a doctor this year.

This is not the time to write off flulike symptoms, Tampa Bay area health officials and doctors warn. The influenza virus is more widespread and active this year than in recent history, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Florida, influenzalike illnesses such as the flu are being reported at higher levels now than during the peak of the past two flu seasons. And the virus continues to gain steam across the state.

Pinellas County has reported more than five outbreaks of flu this season, among the most of any county in the state so far, according to the Florida Department of Health.

"Flu activity is increasing throughout the state. There are more cases in the northern part of the state right now, and Pinellas is still listed as moderate. But we're only in mid January," said

» See FLU, 4A

Flu symptoms

The flu comes with several specific symptoms. We give you the rundown. **4A**